Scott Wagner: Little Sand Fire Timeline and Description

Scott Wagner presented a timeline and breakdown of the Little Sand Fire. He first went through a quick rundown of the timeline of the fire, describing what happened from day to day and how the fire progressed.

Wagner also explained how firefighter and public safety are considered number one during a wildland fire. Private property, wilderness and ecosystems impacts are also important when deciding how to proceed with the fire.

During the Little Sand Fire, the conditions were very difficult. After several years of drought, the area was still suffering from lack of water and record high temperatures. The characteristics of the environment that enhanced the fire were described. These included steep slopes, numerous snags, major wind events, and no safe zones for the firefighters. The area of the fire was also a complex system with multiple tree species and standing dead trees. These characteristics caused torching, spotting, and movement against the wind. This makes it difficult to control because the fire is able to jump the boundary. There was a mixture of burn intensities through the area. Only a small percentage was considered high intensity.

Peter Brown: Fire Ecology

Peter Brown, a dendrochronologist, discussed how one can observe tree rings to discover the fire history. He also discussed several aspects of fire ecology.

One of the main points that should be taken away from this presentation is that fire is inevitable. It is a natural process that goes through all ecosystems and is going to happen eventually no matter how much we suppress it. It removes old biomass buildup and allows room for regeneration.

Forest ecosystems are adapted for fire. For example, unburned areas provide a seed source for burned areas, aspens sprout from roots, and Ponderosa pines have a thick, fire resistant bark.

Tree rings can be used to study past fires. When a tree dies or is injured by a fire, a scar is left or the rings are altered showing different characteristics of that fire. These can be used to determine when the fire occurred and at what intensity.

In the past, forests consisted of open stands and had understory regeneration. Fires would come through and clear out the regeneration, allowing some to survive, creating an uneven aged stand. Fires were also more frequent. Now, there are dense forests with too much regeneration. Because of this, when there is a fire, it is large, higher intensity, and difficult to control. Tree ring research supports this, indicating that fires would go through landscapes at least every few decades.

Fires need to be restored back into the ecosystem. This can be done with prescribed fire and silvicultural treatments. The Little Sand Fire was allowed to burn, in a controlled manner, through the

wilderness area because it was clearing out the excessive amounts of biomass and will allow for regeneration. Forest and fuel reduction activities had been conducted in some areas before the fire, resulting in less intense fire activity once the fire came through.

Breakout Session Collaborative Notes

Community Protection

- What about neighbors?
- CC&R's-tree removal
- Lessons learned: revisit videos
- What values to protect?
- How to get the message out?

Forest Restoration

- Economic feasibility
- Recreation- public understanding of fire behavior and effects
- Better understanding of healthy forest conditions
    - People are used to the "jungle" look
    - Forests change naturally
- Mechanical and prescribed burning
- Educating people
- Letting areas burn during fires
- Grants and cost sharing

Business, Communication and Cooperation

- "Are you open?"
    - Accurate, useful information about the town (businesses, roads, lodging, etc)
    - Links to AC and inciweb
    - Dispelling rumors: interagency communication is key
- Relationships with chamber of commerce, USFS, county, local news, etc
- Social media as info source
- Business "emergency ready" alternatives
- Flow/network of community
    - ID and publicize info sources
    - Shorten the info chain